

Testimony Regarding the Governor's Proposed Budget for Early Childhood Education

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

We strongly support the Governor's proposal to expand access to prekindergarten. We also strongly support the Governor's proposed increase to Care4Kids, the state's child care subsidy program. We urge the legislature to enact the Governor's proposals but consider including additional new resources to ensure that every child served is served in the highest-quality setting.

The research is clear: access to prekindergarten leads to better outcomes in school and in life. Children who attend nurturing, responsive, and language-rich early care and education programs are more likely to be prepared socially and academically for kindergarten, less likely to be retained or need special education services, and more likely to graduate from high school and become productive members of the workforce.¹ Prekindergarten education is a crucial investment in our children's future and our state's future. Studies show that every dollar invested in high-quality early care and education can yield returns of up to seven dollars in savings through reduction of remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services.² Preschool programs for disadvantaged students have been shown to be particularly effective, generating annual return on investments of 16% or higher.³

However, childcare continues to be unaffordable for many Connecticut families, with the average cost of center care for a preschooler reaching almost \$11,000 per year.⁴ The Governor's proposed increase of \$11.2 million for School Readiness, which would create an additional 1,020 preschool spaces for Connecticut's most vulnerable 3- and 4-year-olds, supports working parents, supports the child care industry (a significant source of jobs in the Connecticut economy), and, most importantly, promotes the growth, development, and success of children, who are the future of Connecticut.

The research is also clear that for prekindergarten to have maximal impact, it must be high quality. The Governor's proposed budget revisions demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring that the state's most economically vulnerable children have access to high-quality, accredited programs. We support the Governor's inclusion of funding for quality enhancement for School Readiness in his budget proposal (\$3 million to establish a quality rating and improvement system), as well as the requirement that the proposed new slots be created only in programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

To strengthen and expand on this commitment to quality, we need to focus additional resources on ensuring that we can attract and retain well-qualified teachers. Training and education are crucial for effective early childhood educators. Well-qualified teachers promote child development and learning by creating supportive and healthy learning environments, developing

relationships with family and community, and building meaningful curriculum.⁵ In fact, “... *evidence suggests that teachers with higher educational levels and specific training in early childhood provide care that is warmer and more sensitive to children’s needs and are able to create a more stimulating and language-rich learning environment.*”⁶ Recognizing the importance of highly qualified staff, Public Act 11-54 mandates that the publicly funded workforce meet certain educational attainment benchmarks by 2015 and 2020.⁷

However, Connecticut will not be able to realize this legislative mandate until salaries for preschool teachers are competitive with those of other educators in our state.⁸ As a report by the National Institute for Early Education Research explains, “*inadequate teacher compensation lowers preschool program quality and leads to poorer cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children.*”⁹ Current compensation for prekindergarten teachers is not competitive with professionals with similar qualifications: the average starting salary for an elementary school teacher in Connecticut is \$42,450; the average salary for a prekindergarten teacher, in contrast, is \$29,500.¹⁰ Poor compensation can not only make it harder to attract highly qualified and effective teachers, it can make it difficult to retain them. Annual turnover for preschool teachers can be as high as 25% to 50% per year, in contrast to less than 7% for public school teachers.¹¹ High teacher turnover negatively impacts children’s learning and development.¹² For current early childhood educators to afford the courses they need to meet the rigorous educational credentialing requirements of P.A. 11-54 – and to keep them in the field once they have obtained higher degrees – higher compensation is necessary. It is also necessary if we are to attract and retain the additional teachers we will need as we increase the number of children we serve. Though we applaud the Governor’s 3% rate increase in subsidies for early care and education, this increase alone is insufficient to get us to our goal of paying our early childhood educators a competitive wage that appropriately acknowledges the important work they do in educating and shaping Connecticut’s youngest children, and that will help them develop, foster, and maintain the high-quality education our state needs.

We also need to ensure that all children, regardless of where they live, have access to high-quality early care and education. Though the Governor’s long-term goal of expanding state-subsidized preschool by 4,010 slots by 2019 is the most far-reaching in recent memory, and should be rightfully lauded as such, it continues Connecticut’s history of reaching only children in our Priority and Competitive School Districts. There are children in economically struggling families throughout the state, and their needs must be acknowledged as well.¹³

To this end, we strongly support the Governor’s proposed \$1 million for planning purposes. Presumably this funding would go to the Office of Early Childhood to enable it to create and implement a blueprint for ensuring that increased access to preschool is done in a way that best serves all Connecticut’s young children and their families. The Office of Early Childhood has the capacity to take a broad and comprehensive view of early childhood education in Connecticut, and could work to guarantee that children with the highest-need have access to high-quality care, regardless of where they may live. Moreover, the Governor’s budget indicates the foresight necessary to create a plan not just for universal access to prekindergarten, but for a true early childhood *system*. The Office of Early Childhood lays the foundation for an early care and education system that is capable of meeting the needs of all young children and families effectively, efficiently, and empathetically.

Separately, we support the Governor’s \$15.2 million increase in Care4Kids. This funding is designated both for an increase in rates for all providers (child care centers, family child care, and kith and kin) and to accommodate an expected caseload increase in FY 15. The increase in

reimbursement rates for providers is a critical investment in improving both quality of programs and access for families. Higher reimbursement rates allow providers to improve quality and offer care to families receiving state subsidies, and allow families to access higher-quality early education settings for their children.

It is, however, worth noting that even with the proposed 3% increase, current rates in Connecticut remain well below the federally recommended level: the 75th percentile of current market rates, which is designed to allow families to access three out of every four providers in their community. In 2013, Connecticut's monthly reimbursement rate for center care for a four-year-old in the North Central Region of Connecticut was \$650, which was \$416 (39 percent) below the 75th percentile of current market rates for this type of care.¹⁴ As the National Women's Law Center explains, "*Inadequate reimbursement rates deprive child care providers of the resources needed to offer high-quality care and may discourage high-quality providers from serving families who receive child care assistance.*"¹⁵ To ensure that Connecticut's most at-risk kids can access the highest quality care, not just the cheapest care, the state must continue to increase Care4Kids rates.

Overall, the Governor's proposed budget makes important investments in Connecticut's young children and families. This effort must be coupled with ongoing, and increased, financial support to enable parents to access high quality early care and education programs, to support a more stable, more experienced, and better educated early care and education workforce, and to serve a greater number of the state's vulnerable children. Connecticut's future depends on increased and sustained investments in its youngest children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

- ¹ Susan H. Landry, "Effective Early Childhood Programs" The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (2005), available at <http://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/library/publications/documents/Effective-Early-Childhood-Programs.pdf>.
- ² Reynolds, Temple, Roberson, & Mann, Chicago Longitudinal Study, available at: <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/icd/research/cls/publication.html>.
- ³ James Heckman and Dimitriy Masterov, "The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children," Review of Agricultural Economics 29, 3, 2007: 446-493
- ⁴ 211 Child Care. "Fee Analysis of Child Care Facilities in Connecticut: July 16, 2013." Available at <http://www.211childcare.org/professionals/FeeCT.asp>.
- ⁵ See "NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs," (July 2009), available at <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/ProfPrepStandards09.pdf>
- ⁶ Edward Zigler, Walter S. Gilliam, and Stephanie M. Jones, A Vision for Universal Preschool Education (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 110, as cited in Marisa Bueno, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Danielle Gonzales, "A Matter of Degrees: Preparing teachers for the Pre-K Classroom," The Pew Center on the States, (March 2010), available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k_education/PkN_Education_Reform_Series_FINAL.pdf
- ⁷ Under PA 11-54, available at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/act/pa/2011PA-00054-R00SB-00927-PA.htm>, the publicly funded workforce must meet certain educational attainment benchmarks by 2015 and 2020. By 2015, 50% of head teachers must hold a bachelor's degree in an approved early childhood or related program, or a teaching certificate with an early childhood endorsement. All head teachers without a bachelor's degree must hold an associate's degree in the field. By 2020, all head teachers must hold a BA or teaching certification with an endorsement. Current teachers with Bas in non-related fields are grandfathered in and exempt from the requirements.
- ⁸ See Marisa Bueno, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Danielle Gonzales, "A Matter of Degrees: Preparing teachers for the Pre-K Classroom," The Pew Center on the States, (March 2010), available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k_education/PkN_Education_Reform_Series_FINAL.pdf
- ⁹ See W. Steven Barnett, "Low Wages = Low Quality: Solving the Real Preschool Teacher Crisis," National Institute for Early Education Research, (March 2003), available at: <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/3.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ See "2011-2012 Average Starting Teacher Salaries by State," National Education Association, available at: <http://www.nea.org/home/2011-2012-average-starting-teacher-salary.html>; see "Day Care Center Teacher Salaries in New Haven, CT, available at: <http://www1.salary.com/CT/New-Haven/Day-Care-Center-Teacher-salary.html>.
- ¹¹ See W. Steven Barnett, "Low Wages = Low Quality: Solving the Real Preschool Teacher Crisis," National Institute for Early Education Research, (March 2003), available at: <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/3.pdf>.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ See "Poverty, Income, and Health Insurance in Connecticut Cities and Towns: Summary of 2008-2012 American Community Survey Census Data," Connecticut Voices for Children, (January 2014), available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/econ14townwellbeing5year.pdf>. "The percent of all children under 18 statewide in poverty increased to 13.2% in ACS 2008-2012, up from 10.4% in Census 2000 (1999 figures). The following towns had statistically significant increases in the percent of all children in poverty: Ansonia, Avon, Berlin, Branford, Bridgeport, Cornwall, Danbury, Darien, Derby, East Haddam, East Hartford, East Haven, Enfield, Hartford, Harwinton, Litchfield, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, New Hartford, New Haven, Norwich, Plymouth, Preston, Stamford, Vernon, Waterbury, West Haven, Windham, and Windsor Locks." See also "Confronting Suburban Poverty in America," available at: <http://confrontingsuburbanpoverty.org/action-toolkit/charts-data/>. Census data from the past decade shows an increase in suburban poverty in Connecticut – for example, the Hartford, Middlesex, and Tolland counties had the second-fastest gain in suburban poverty of any metro in the northeast from 2000 to 2011. In Hartford suburbs alone, poverty grew 62% from 2000 to 2011.
- ¹⁴ "State Child Care Assistance Policies: Connecticut," National Women's Law Center, (December 2013), available at: <http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ccsubsidy2013/connecticut-childcare-subsidy2013.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, "Pivot Point: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2013," National Women's Law Center, (October 2013), available at: http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_nwlc_2013statechildcareassistancereport.pdf.